1697

A SERMON

Preached at

St. *LAWRENCE JEWRY*,

Before the

LORD-MAYOR,

Aldermen, and Livery-Men,

OF THE

CITY of *LONDON*;

On *Saturday* the 28th of *September*, 1695.

AT THE

Election of the LORD-MAYOR

For the YEAR Ensuing.

By JOHN WILLIAMS, D.D. Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty; and Rector of St. *Mildreds Poultrey*, and St. *Mary Cole*.

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To the Right Honourable

Sir THOMAS LANE, Lord-Mayor,

Sir JOHN HOUBLON, Lord-Mayor Elect

Of the City of *LONDON.*

And the Court of ALDERMEN.

RIGHT HONOURABLE,

IT is not for me to think otherwiſe than well of a Performance which has the Order of your Court for its Publication. And it is in Obedience to that, and for promoting the ſame End for which this Sermon was Compoſed, that 'tis now Preſented to Your Lordſhips, by

Your Moſt Faithful,

And Humble Servant,

JOHN WILLIAMS.

A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

LORD-MAYOR, &c.

JOSHUA XXII. 31.

Phineas the son of Eleazar the Priest, said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, "This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because ye have "not committed this Trespass against the Lord: Now ye have delivered the Children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord.

THESE Words are the Close of a solemn Debate between the Ten Tribes of *Israel* that had their Lot in *Canaan*, on the *West* of the River *Jordan*, and the Two Tribes and a Half that were scituated on the *East* of it.

The

The Occasion of which was this: After the Conquest of *Canaan* by the *Israelites*, and an End in all appearance put to that War, the Two Tribes and an Half, who till that time by the Command of *Moses*, and their own Promise, stood obliged to attend it, were dismiss'd by *Joshua*, and were upon return to their own Inheritance.

Numb. 32. 17, &c.

When they landed on the other side, and before their dispersion to their several Homes, they agreed to build an Altar at the Place where the Children of *Israel* had first passed over, *ver.* 10. after the Pattern of that at *Shiloh*, *ver.* 28.

This, to those that knew not their reason, nor their Motives leading to it, seemed an intolerable Presumption; since there was to be but one Altar for Sacrifice, *ver.* 23. and that at *the place which God should chuse to put his name there*, Deut. 12. 5, 6.

And then to set up another Altar in opposition to that, and to break off from the Communion of the Church established by God's Appointment among them, was in effect to set up another Religion, and to be guilty of Rebellion against the Lord, *ver.* 16. 19.

Upon Tidings therefore of this, the Ten Tribes gathered themselves together to *Shiloh*, the Place at that time where the Tabernacle was pitched, where God was worshipped, and whose Cause they

they were bound to defend; and according to the Precept of the Law they were resolved to proceed against them as Idolaters, if the Fact proved according to their Information, *Deut.* 13. 15.

But here they proceeded like a wise and cautious People; for in matters of such Importance, and attended with such fatal Consequences as a Civil War, and the Destruction of Two of their Tribes, there needed great Deliberation, and a careful attendance to the Method in such cases prescribed in the same Law, (*Deut.* 13. 12, *&c.*) viz. *If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities which the Lord thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other Gods (which we have not known) then thou shalt enquire, and make search, and ask diligently*; that is, they were to use the utmost Care to obtain a true Information of the Fact.

After this manner did the *Western* Tribes act in this case, and sent *Phineas* the Son of *Eleazar* the Priest, and Ten Princes, one out of each Tribe, to expostulate the matter with their Brethren, and to seek by fair means to reduce them.

These Commissioners, as well as the whole Congregation, took the Case, as represented to

them, for granted; and when they came to the place were Eye-Witneſſes of the Fact: They ſaw the Altar, and that it was a Pattern of the Altar of the Lord; and like Perſons zealous for the Good and Peace of their Countrey, and for the Purity and Honour of their Religion, they no ſooner came, but they delivered their Errand, ſaying in the Name of the whole Congregation, *What treſpaſs is this that ye have committed againſt the God of Iſrael, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have built you an altar, that ye might rebel this day againſt the Lord?* v. 16, &c.

But after a patient and full hearing of the Charge, the Two Tribes utterly diſclaim it, appealing to God, the Witneſs and Judge of all, That they were ſo far from erecting this Altar in oppoſition to that appointed by God as the only Altar for Sacrifice, that, on the contrary, it was built for aſſerting and maintaining their Right to it; and for fear leſt (*Jordan* being their Border, and by which they were ſeparated from the other Tribes) that in time to come they might have their Propriety and Intereſt in the True Altar queſtioned; and therefore they agreed to make an Altar after the Pattern of it, that might be a *Witneſs* and Memorial to Future Generations, That they on their ſide *Jordan* had as much a Right in that at *Shiloh*,

Shiloh, as thoſe that lived *in the poſſeſſion wherein the tabernacle of the Lord dwelt.*

When *Phineas* and the other Delegates heard this, they were pleaſed and fully ſatisfied in this Relation; and he concluded all in the Words of the Text, *This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, becauſe ye have not committed this treſpaſs againſt the Lord.*

In treating upon which Words, I deſign not to confine my ſelf wholly unto them, but ſhall conſider them as the Cloſe of this Narrative; and accordingly I ſhall take the liberty to make ſome Obſervations from the whole.

As, I obſerve,

1. That Prepoſſeſſions and Miſunderſtandings are too often the occaſion of great Diviſions in the World, and of ſuch as, if not prevented, draw after them very pernicious and fatal Conſequences. Thus it was in the Caſe before us; it was a Report, a Hear-ſay, *ver.* 11. *The children of Iſrael heard ſay, Behold, the children of Reuben, Gad, and of the half tribe of Manaſſeh, have built an altar over-againſt the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the paſſage of the children of Iſrael.* And upon this Report, the whole Congregation of the Ten Tribes aſſembled at *Shiloh*, *to go up to war againſt them.*

2. There ought to be the ſpeedieſt and moſt effectual Care taken for preventing the Ill Conſequences of ſuch Miſunderſtandings, and to take up the Caſe before it comes to the utmoſt extremity. It was ſo here. The exaſperated Tribes, like Perſons reſolved to vindicate the Common Cauſe of Religion, came with the Sword in their hand; that if the ſuppoſed Delinquents ſhould have acted according as it was repreſented, and ſhould prove obſtinate and incorrigible, they might proceed to the utmoſt ſeverity. But they acted with all the Precaution neceſſary; they ſent ſuch Delegates as were in all points accompliſh'd for ſuch a Service, whether for Quality and Authority, for Prudence and Experience, who argued the Caſe with all the Arts of Reſpect and Endearment. They in the firſt place expoſtulate the matter with them; *What treſpaſs is this?* &c. ---- *Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us?* --- *but that ye muſt turn this day from following the Lord?* &c. And then with great Tenderneſs they offer any Terms in their power, and are freely willing, that if the Two Tribes like not their Habitation on the other ſide *Jordan*, and think their Poſſeſſion *unclean*, that they might chuſe where they would among the other, rather than rebel againſt God by ſuch a Separation.

3. That

3. That the moſt proper Method for preventing ſuch Miſunderſtandings, and for compoſing Differences ariſing from ſuch Miſunderſtandings, is Examination and Enquiry into the Cauſe, with Deliberation and Meekneſs, that they may ſee where the difference lies, and take the beſt courſe for the compoſing of it. It was ſo here, the Commiſſioners were prepoſſeſs'd, and came with Prejudice, upon a falſe Information, or rather their Miſtake grounded upon the Information; and withal, were zealouſly bent to puniſh the Aggreſſors. But their Zeal was governed by Prudence, it did not make them precipitate and raſh, nor tranſport them beyond the bounds of Decency and Reſpect. They delivered the Senſe of the Aſſembly, as became Repreſentatives of ſo Venerable a Body as the Congregation of the Lord. They expoſtulate, and they argue; but it is with Softneſs and Candor: The Expoſtulation was affecting, and the Arguing ſtrong, but the Condeſcention was equal to both. There were no Reproaches, no Hard Words, no bitter Reflections. They had to deal with Brethren, (though, as they ſuppoſed, notorious Offenders) and they uſed them as ſuch. Let us view the Words again; *What treſpaſs is this? ----Is the iniquity of Peor too little? ----Notwithſtanding, if the land of your poſſeſſion be unclean;*

unclean (as perhaps you imagine) *then paſs ye over*, &c. *but rebel not.*

And the ſame way is to be taken for removing Prejudices and Miſunderſtandings, even by thoſe that ſuffer, or are likely to ſuffer by them. And of this the Two Tribes are an admirable Example, in the Defence they make for themſelves, and the Reply they give to this unexpected and hard Accuſation. They were wrongfully charged with a Crime of a heinous nature, no leſs than Rebellion againſt God, and ſuch as might have involved them in utter Ruin. They found how their Brethren of the other Tribes, upon a Miſreport, were diſpoſed to War upon them: And what Warmth might be expected upon ſuch a Provocation, to find them ſo credulous, and forward, and exaſperated for nothing? But ſee how on the contrary they behave themſelves in their Reſentments and Reply, which is as calm and modeſt, as it was grave and ſerious. They begin with a ſolemn and moſt pathetical Appeal to God, as a Witneſs of their Innocency, *ver.* 22. *The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth*, &c. and conclude with as ſolemn a Proteſtation, *ver.* 29. *God forbid that we ſhould rebel againſt the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt-offerings, ----beſides the altar of the Lord our God that is before his tabernacle.*

Here

Here were no Invectives, no Recriminations, no Revilings, no Charges of Slander and Calumny; but all was carried on with a becoming Modesty and Meekness.

4. It is a comfortable Evidence of God's Presence with a People to bless, defend, and prosper them, when Mistakes are removed, Differences happily composed, and they are at Union and Peace among themselves. It was so here, when the Case was understood, and that after the fear of so dangerous and threatning a Rupture, it appeared that there was no sufficient ground for such a Surmise as the Ten Tribes had entertained, and all was quietly ended. So the Text; *This day*, said *Phineas*, *we perceive that the Lord is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the Lord.*

I shall treat of these in their Order.

1. I observe that Prepossessions and Misunderstandings are too often the Occasion of great Divisions in the World; and of such, as if not timely prevented, draw after them very pernicious and fatal Consequences.

We ought to have more Charity for Mankind than to think any of such Rancorous and Diabolical Tempers, as to do Evil for Evil's sake, and to divide the World, and break the Frame of Order and Government in pieces, solely for the sake of the

the Miſchief conſequent upon it, without any Provocation or Cauſe whatever.

And yet if we come to look narrowly into the contentions among mankind, if it were not for Charity that inclines us to better thoughts, we ſhould often be under a violent temptation to think there are ſome that quarrel for quarrelling's ſake, when the matters in debate, and ſo hotly agitated on either ſide, are in their own nature, and are ſeen to be ſo by wiſe and diſcerning men, next to nothing, and not fit and worth the while to be enquired into, much leſs to be contended about; were it not to diſabuſe well-meaning perſons, that are hurried along in the crowd, and carried away by the precipitance of thoſe whom they follow, and whoſe Judgment they rely upon; or for preventing ſuch miſchief as ſometimes enſues upon a neglect of them.

Solomon tells us, That *the beginning of ſtrife is as when one letteth out Water*, Prov. 17. 14. which perhaps begins in a few drops, but by degrees makes its own way, and at laſt becomes a Torrent, and bears down all before it. Now we can as little ſuppoſe that the Contentions which afterwards ſwell to ſo prodigious a height as by their force to carry away ſuch Numbers along with them, ſhould at firſt ſpring from contemptible cauſes and occaſions;

ſions; were it not that at length the Paſſions of men gradually inflame the Quarrel, or that thoſe that uſher'd them into the world, and afterward kept up the Ball of Contention, did through miſtake think them to be of great importance, when in reality they were of none. For if they had but the patience to trace them up to their original, they would ſee that they are in their nature or their reaſons very weak and impertinent; and proceed from ſuch principles and occaſions as they would be aſhamed to own, and which could never have got ſuch a footing and ground, were it not that they roſe, have grown and been hatch'd up under the favour of Miſtakes and Prejudices.

And yet theſe are occaſions that the wiſeſt of men are not above; and no more is it to be expected that ever they ſhould be altogether free from ſuch like Miſunderſtandings, than that they themſelves ſhould ſee every thing with their own eyes, hear all with their own ears, and need no information. No more is it to be expected, than they ſhould be freed from all Paſſion and Reſentments, from all Precipitancy and Error in Judgment. We have an Inſtance of this in the Caſe before us, when the whole Congregation was ſo far impoſed upon by a miſtaken Relation on one hand, and their own Imagination on the other (when they

heard that the Two Tribes had built an Altar like that of *Shiloh*, and conceived it was an Altar for Sacrifice) that it had like to have engaged them in a Deſtructive War. It was ſo with *Moſes* himſelf, in the caſe of the ſame people, when the Two Tribes and a Half applied themſelves to him for a Poſſeſſion on the other ſide *Jordan*, which he on the ſudden miſinterpreted, as if they conſulted their own Eaſe and Safety, and ſo diſcouraged their Brethren; whereas their deſign was concurrent with his, and conſiſtent with the aid he required, and they were willing to give to the other Tribes in the Wars of *Canaan*.

And if we go from ſingle Perſons to a Multitude, the Caſe will admit of farther Exemplification; as it was with thoſe at *Epheſus*, when *ſome cried one thing, and ſome another; for the aſſembly was confuſed, and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together*; but the Word was given, and thoſe that were ſtrangers to the firſt Riſe of the Tumult, yet joined in the common Voice of *Great is Diana of the Epheſians*, Acts 19. 32, 33.

It is upon ſuch Miſunderſtandings that the greateſt Feuds in Church and State are for the moſt part graffed. We find very often that the Paſſions and Miſtakes of men keep them more at a diſtance than the matters about which they contend; and

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if we can but bring them together to diſcourſe the Point calmly, the Controverſy is ſoon brought to an iſſue; and they readily own, that had they known ſo much before, and that the Adverſary had been ſo diſpoſed to a Reconciliation, and the Matter ſo capable of it, the Breach might have been long before made up, to their mutual quiet and ſatisfaction. And thus it is often in Diſputes, whether about Religious or Civil Affairs. That which makes the Point in diſpute conſiderable, and the Breach ſeemingly irreconcilable, is a Multitude of Words, a Troop of Exaggerations and Aggravations, much Paſſion and Vehemence, a Stiffneſs of Temper, and a Strangeneſs in Converſation; and when thus dreſs'd up, it is no wonder, that though the Controverſy be without life, and the Trumpet give an uncertain ſound, yet all prepare themſelves to the Battel.

But if the matter were to be ſeparated from theſe, and to ſtand alone, without all theſe Comments and pretended Expoſitions, it would appear to be quite another thing, and to afford little or no ground for ſuch Contention.

And this is evident to the By-ſtanders that are unconcerned, if not to the Litigants and Contenders themſelves, when the Cloud of their Paſſion is removed, and the Heat of the Controverſy is worn off.

For what do we now think of the tedious aud miſchievous Controverſy aforetime about Leaven in the Sacrament, that almoſt rent in pieces the *Eaſtern* and *Weſtern* Churches, and made way for the Irruption of the *Saracens*? What of the Controverſy in the laſt Age, concerning the Decrees and Five Points, which ſo divided our neighbouring Nation, and drew ſo many others into the quarrel? Not to mention the moſt impertinent of all, thoſe many Feuds in the *Romiſh* Church, and in particular that of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin *Mary*, which Popes and Councils, after 300 years diſpute have been afraid to determine.

And God knows what thoſe that ſhall live in the Age or Ages after us will think of ſome Controverſies that now diſturb the Chriſtian World, and which even in this Nation keep afoot Animoſities, and uphold Separations?

But to come nearer to our purpoſe, the Caſe is the ſame in Secular Matters, where Miſunderſtandings frequently begin, and keep up the Contention. Men quarrel about nothing, or what is extremely frivolous. 'Tis for the moſt part a Hearſay that begins the Quarrel; Characters of Perſons they don't know, and Affairs they are not acquainted with, and know little more of than they do of the other World, or the moſt Foreign Nations

tions in this; nay, perhaps they loſe the firſt Scent and Point in debate; but the Heat continues, and brings new Matter upon the ſtage, and then they are to begin the world again.

If indeed the Event in ſuch Caſes was of no greater concernment than the things they miſtake in, it would not be much material whether perſons were in the right or in the wrong. But it often happens the Miſchief is not the leſs for the Miſunderſtanding; for when the Paſſions are once engaged, they make every little thing to be great, and Preſumption ſhall paſs for Right, and Shew for Certainty; and then it ſhall be eſtabliſh'd as an infallible Maxim, That Right and Truth muſt upon no account be parted with; *Fiat Juſtitia, & ruat Cœlum.* And then come in Contempt of Superiors, Defamations, Reproaches, and Invectives; Factions and Parties. And whilſt, like the exaſperated *Jews* (*Acts* 22. 23.) they throw duſt into the Air, they ſee not one another; Friendſhip and Enmity are confounded; and at laſt, if they loſe not the Cauſe they firſt appeared in, they loſe that which is greater, Unity, Moderation, and Charity, and true Care for the Publick Good. So that in the iſſue it proves like the Scaling of a Fort, when under the Covert of the Smoke the Enemy ſecurely advances and ſurprizes them; they betray

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the Publick Peace, Order, and Conſtitution; and if there were an Enemy to ſeize it, (which God forbid) he would eaſily eſpy and make uſe of ſuch an advantage.

And therefore this is a Caſe not to be neglected. Which brings the next Head under Conſideration, *viz.*

2. There ought to be the ſpeedieſt and moſt effectual Care taken for preventing the ill Conſequences of ſuch Miſunderſtandings; and to take up the Caſe before it comes to the utmoſt Extremity.

The firſt thing here to be done, is, if it might be, the preventing Miſtakes and Miſunderſtandings; but ſince *it is impoſſible but that offences* in that kind *will come*; the next is to rectify them, and by ſetting things in their proper light, and by giving all occaſions and advantages for Enquiry and Satisfaction, to let them ſee they are miſtaken either in the Truth or the Importance of the matters in diſpute; and that if they ſhould be in the right, it is but a *ſtrife of words, tending to no profit, but to the ſubverſion* of the Publick Peace.

For which reaſon there cannot be too much care taken, as *Solomon* adviſes in the place before quoted, *The beginning of ſtrife is as one letteth out water; therefore leave off*, and ſo ſuppreſs *contention before it be meddled*

meddled with; before it gets footing and ſtrength, and that it comes to diſtinguiſh a Party.

And tho here it's the part of every one, of what Capacity ſoever, to *ſtudy to be quiet*, and to preſerve the Tranquillity and good Order of the Place, Nation, and City where he is; yet herein above all doth the Conduct of a Good Magiſtrate appear. In quiet and regular Times, when all things are eaſy and calm, an ordinary Care will be ſufficient to guard the Community, and to preſerve it from danger. But as the Skill of a Pilot is beſt ſeen and tried in a Storm, or Perilous Coaſtings: So is the Prudence and Courage of a Magiſtrate, when there are high Diſcontents and Oppoſitions; that he may know when to Act, and when to Forbear; when to Hold, and when to Yield; and to keep a Steady Hand between the Preſerving his own Authority, and the Publick Peace: That he may not betray his Authority, and expoſe the Honour of his Station to Contempt by a too haſty deſire for Peace, and by too eaſy Compliances and Condeſcenſions; nor on the other hand break the Peace, and endanger the Publick, by being too tenacious of his Authority. It is then a difficult Task to temper the Minds of the Froward, to remove Prejudices, to bear with the Weak, and even the Impertinent;

to

to convince the Miſtaken, and like another St. *Paul*, to *become all things to all*: And above all, to prevent the ill Conſequences of the Miſunderſtandings of ſuch as mean well, but err dangerouſly; that are perſons of Conſcience, but yet whoſe Conſcience through Miſtake is ſet the wrong way; that think they do the Publick (as others *think they do God*) *Service*, *John* 16. 2. when they take the ready way to bring all into Confuſion.

Such Perſons are to be pitied, and uſed with Tenderneſs and Reſpect; and it may be worth the while to ſeek and endeavour their Satisfaction and Recovery, to lay open and convince them of their Miſtakes: For if convinced, they will be made Hearty, Zealous, and Truſty Friends; and like St. *Paul* when reduc'd to the Belief of the Chriſtian Doctrine, his Zeal and his Conſcience went along with him, and he *laboured more abundantly than all* the reſt of *the Apoſtles*.

3. The moſt proper way for preventing the Miſchiefs too often conſequent upon ſuch Miſunderſtandings, is to enquire into the Merits of the Cauſe; and patiently and deliberately to weigh what belongs to it.

The Congregation in this Chapter went not headily on; but ſent (as has been before ſaid) proper

proper Delegates to enquire into the Reaſons upon which the Two Tribes proceeded: As to what was to follow, in caſe they found them perverſe and obſtinate, the Law was to be their Guide and Warrant; and that being a matter of great Importance they were very ſolicitous in. Now what Matter of Fact was to them, that Matter of Right is to us; and a perſon needs to be well adviſed, and has good reaſon to queſtion his own Underſtanding, when he is ſure that the Event of his preſent Deſign and Enterpriſe may, and in all probability will be very pernicious. He has need to deliberate, when he is not nor can be ſo ſure he is in the right, as he is ſure of the ill conſequence of it, and of a conſequence as miſchievous as if he was in the wrong. He may juſtly then queſtion the Truth, Lawfulneſs, and Neceſſity of it; Whether, for example, that is lawful, which will produce, or is likely to produce, the worſt of effects, that is, Confuſion: Or, Whether what he contends for is as neceſſary or more neceſſary than the Peace he muſt part with for it.

I grant, that as a Neceſſary War is more eligible than a Shameful or Dangerous Peace; ſo there are thoſe Rights and Privileges that are to be held faſter than Peace: But when Peace and Order are ſuch choice and valuable Bleſſings, that nothing is

ordinarily more neceſſary than them to the Welfare of Mankind, and the Well-being of the World; I have ſufficient cauſe to enquire into and to be ſatisfied in the Truth and Importance of thoſe things which I muſt purchaſe at ſo dear a rate as the parting with my own Quiet, and the Publick Peace and Order for.

There are ſome caſes where it is worth my while to venture my Life for preſerving what I have, or obtaining what I deſire, but when my Life is brought into imminent Hazard by an Enterprize, I have a warrantable reaſon to be well ſatisfied in the Truth and Certainty, the Excellency and Neceſſity of the things I venture it for.

Therefore I take it for a certain Rule, That where the Advantage and Excellency of what I gain is not more than ſufficient to counterbalance what I loſe or part with for the ſake of it, I may juſtly ſuſpect, at leaſt ſuſpend and deliberate.

And when the loſs of ſuch excellent things as Publick Order and Peace are likely to be the Event of my preſent proceedings, and of the courſe that Affairs will be thereby put into, I have reaſon to conſider, and to think I may be miſtaken, and impartially to weigh all over again.

For I cannot be miſtaken about Peace and Order; they are beyond all exception to be valued and reſpected; but I may be miſtaken in the Matters I purſue, or the Method in which I purſue them; and which I cannot purſue without putting thoſe ineſtimable things into hazard.

This is a matter that, if carefully attended, would go a great way toward the removing many Miſtakes that trouble the Peace of the World, and break in upon the Eſtabliſh'd Order of a Nation or City.

It is none of my deſign to intermeddle in thoſe Affairs which belong to Perſons of another Station; but I may, and it is our buſineſs to lay down Rules for the guiding of mens Conſciences in points of Difficulty. And I think we may ſafely rely upon that as ſuch, that there is nothing can bind againſt Peace and Order; and what always tends to Confuſion, and breaks Order in pieces, whereever it comes, is deſervedly to be ſuſpected, and I may ſafely ſay muſt needs be falſe; that is, that which tends to bring things into the ſame ſtate as they were in before, would have been without, and were brought out of by the eſtabliſhing of Government.

Here we muſt ſtick; and wherever this is, there a perſon muſt ſtop, as he would if upon the

top of a Precipice, till he has ſearched to the utmoſt, and has received unqueſtionable ſatiſfaction.

The loſs of Peace and Order, Unity and Charity, are the utmoſt extremity that a ſtate of things can be brought into; and which are like the Life of another, that a perſon is not to take away, till he can no longer defend and preſerve his own, and can run no farther: And are therefore to be kept always in our eye, and are the Polar Star by which we muſt judge of our Way, and guide our ſelves in the Courſe we are to obſerve, whether to the right hand or to the left.

For Miſtakes in theſe things are extremely dangerous; and when matters of ſuch Importance depend upon the Principles we eſpouſe, and the Courſe we take, we cannot be too careful or inquiſitive, before we proceed or engage too far in a deſign. We ought then to be as wary as we would be if our Life were therein nearly concerned.

For Peace and Order are to the Publick what Life is to our ſelves, and are not to be parted with upon terms leſs urgent and neceſſary. And if as often as perſons venture upon the doing of what has an apparent tendency to the Diſturbance or Diſſolution of Government, they would put their own

own Life into the Scale with it, the Balance would incline another way; and they would no more do what has a tendency to the one, without previous Conſideration, than they would do what has a tendency to the other. And I ſhould deſire no better Security for the one than the other; for the Peace of the Government, than the Preſervation of mens Lives. All would then be quiet, *the Swords* that are drawn, and the Contentions that fetch Blood of the Publick, and endanger its ſafety, *would be turned into ploughſhares*; and *peace be within our walls, and proſperity within our palaces.*

But if we cannot prevent Miſunderſtandings, yet the miſchievous Conſequences may in great part be prevented; for there may be Charity where there are Miſtakes; and Charity will teach us to be favourable in our opinions of others; and incline us to *think*, as it will teach us to do, *no ill.* Charity here begins at home, and will teach us to condemn the Faults we find there, in our Selves, Families, and Parties, before we adventure to pry into, publiſh and cenſure thoſe of others. Charity will teach us to put our ſelves into the circumſtances of others, to bear with their infirmities, *conſidering our ſelves*, according to the Apoſtle's Advice, *Gal.* 6. 1. *leſt*

we

we alſo be tempted; and to make the ſame allowances which, if in their condition and circumſtances, we would deſire others to make to us. If this were put into practice, though we may miſtake, and there will be Miſunderſtandings, yet Miſtakes would then do no great hurt; but would be like the Wild Beaſts in the *Holy Mountain*, (Iſa. 11. 9.) that would loſe their ravenous and venomous nature, and become cicurated, tame and innocent.

And above all, there is a farther Bleſſing.

For,

4. Such a State and Temper is a comfortable Evidence of God's Preſence with a People; as it is in the Text; *This day we perceive the Lord is among us, becauſe ye have not committed this treſpaſs againſt the Lord*; and that they had made evident they were all of one mind, and alike ſtedfaſt in the profeſſion of the ſame Religion.

This, I ſay, is an evidence of God's Preſence, where there is an union of Hearts and Affections, and a joint concurrence in the ſame Practice; for *God is not the author of confuſion*, ἀκαταστασίας, tumult and unquietneſs, *but of peace*, 1 Cor. 14. 33.

Broils and Contentions might with allowance be continued among the Heathens, when their gods

gods themſelves were divided into Sides and Parties; but are not to be defended under the Chriſtian Religion, where *the end of the commandment is charity*, 1 Tim. 1. 5. and that we worſhip but one and the ſame God.

How excellent a ſtate of things would there be, if this ſo Generous and Noble a Principle, Charity, and *the peace of God ruled in our hearts*, *Col.* 3. 15. and that each Party would ſtrive to outdo and excel each other in?

How excellent a ſtate of things would it be, if the Inferior would not revile the Superior, nor the Superior ſet at nought the Inferior? That the Inferior would as much ſtudy to obey with Humility and Modeſty, as the Superior to rule with Lenity and Moderation? And that among all, the Cauſe of a Friend might be examined with the ſame Exactneſs and Juſtice as that of an Enemy; and an Enemy's with the ſame Caution, Reſpect, and Indifference, as that of a Friend?

What an excellent ſtate of things would it be, if all the Tribes came hither this day, as they were wont to go up to *Jeruſalem*, with one conſent, *Pſal.* 122. 4. and were one Body in Affection, as they are one by Conſtitution?

It were to be wiſhed, That there were but One *Altar*, and One Communion; that all the Nation

Nation were but one Church, and that *with one mind and one mouth we did glorify God, even the father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, Rom. 15. 6.

It were to be wished, That this Populous and Flourishing City were in all respects like *Jerusalem* in its most Prosperous and Happy State, *a city compact together*, and at perfect Unity in it self.

How might we then hope to have God among us, and that might be our Song as it was theirs, *We have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks*, Isa. 26. 1.

But next to that, is to be soft and gentle, calm and easy in our Differences. We cannot expect to be all of a mind, (that, if ever it be, must be the work of time, and a peculiar Act of the Divine Providence) but we may be peaceable and quiet, studious of the Common Good, and Zealous Promoters of it. We need not be fierce and bitter; we need not *bite*, worry, *and devour one another*, Gal. 5. 15. We need not backbite and calumniate, vilify and reproach; and search for matter to asperse, disparage, and load our Adversaries with, and be glad when we find it. We need not go out of this world, disquiet the Ashes, and blacken the Memories of the dead, and deal as barbarously with them, as the *Philistines*

liſtines did with *Saul*, 1 Sam. 31. 9. when they cut off his Head, ſtripp'd off his Armour, and ſent it round about to publiſh it among the people; as if there were not matter enough among the Living, to find thoſe hateful Vices of Envy and Malice an Employment. We need not, laſtly, be froward and ſullen, and rather give up the whole, than not in all points have our own way; and expoſe all to inevitable ruin, than not have our own Humour, nay, our own Reaſon ſometimes gratified: *For then muſt we needs go out of the world.*

How becoming rather is it our Profeſſion; how worthy of our common Religion; how much for the Safety and Honour of this Flouriſhing City; and which is more, for the Honour of Almighty God, whoſe Favour and Bleſſing we at this time come to ſeek, and whoſe Preſence we truſt is now among us, to depart hence with a ſtedfaſt Reſolution of obſerving the excellent Rules of our Holy Religion, and of making good in Practice the Character given of Charity by the Apoſtle, 1 *Cor.* 13. 4. &c. *Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind; Charity envieth not; Charity vaunteth not it ſelf, is not puffed up* with Self conceit, nor prone to deſpiſe others; *doth not behave it ſelf unſeemly* in Words or Behaviour; *ſeeketh not her own,*

to the prejudice of others; *is not easily provoked*; *thinks* and *suspects no evil*; *rejoiceth not in iniquity*, in the Slips, Miscarriages, and Faults of others, *but rejoiceth in the truth*, in whatever is praise-worthy, wherever it is: *Beareth* and concealeth *all things* that are fit to be concealed; *believeth all things*, so as to put the best construction upon them that they are capable of; and *hopeth all things*, where it cannot, and has no sufficient reason to believe; *endureth all things*, so as not to revenge any evil done to our selves, and to do all we can for the good of others.

If this be, we may have reason to say with *Phineas* in the Text, *This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass* of Division and Strife *against the Lord*. That this may be the Event of our Preaching, our Prayers, and present Assembling together, God of his Infinite Goodness and Mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

F I N I S.